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LETTER DATED 4 NOVEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ITALY TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy on 3 November 1996, concerning the situation in eastern Zaire.

I would be grateful if you could have the text of the press release circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) F. Paolo FULCI
Ambassador

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Annex

Press statement issued on 3 November 1996 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy

Rome, 3 November 1996 - The Italian Government's operations in relation to the crisis in eastern Zaire are fully under way after the Foreign Ministry evacuated from Kivu all last week hundreds of Italian and European citizens, also bringing to safety 30 Zairian clerics whose lives were endangered by reprisals from Tutsi rebels.

The Ministry's action, according to instructions given by Foreign Minister Dini, is threefold:

- The protection of Italians and other Europeans situated in Kivu;

- The promotion of a political initiative at the African level to initiate negotiations between Zaire and its neighbours, particularly Rwanda;

- The creation of the conditions needed for the delivery of food, medicine and clothing to more than 700,000 refugees amassed in refugee camps on the Goma border with no other help, after the departure of the personnel of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, except for a handful of missionaries and volunteers, primarily Italian, who continue to lend assistance with limited means and extraordinary self-sacrifice.

The airlift organized by the Ministry's crisis unit made it possible last week to bring to safety 217 people, including 65 Italians and 30 Zairian missionaries. The evacuees included 20 German citizens, 12 French, 14 Belgians and 9 Spaniards. Foreign Minister Kinkel of Germany expressed to Minister Dini his deep appreciation of the Italian action, which was conducted with the greatest possible discretion to take advantage of the limited hours during which the Kivu airport was open during the crisis. The Ambassador of France to Rome also made a similar démarche to the Ministry.

Yesterday the Italian Foreign Ministry evacuated by land 37 people from Bukavu towards Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. The evacuees included 8 Italian missionaries, 20 Belgians, 5 Spaniards, 2 Frenchmen and some citizens of the Netherlands and Switzerland.

In reality, the Foreign Ministry had already begun to take the necessary precautions at the end of September, when the crisis unit urged the missionary orders to reduce their presence in Kivu. The first evacuation was actually on 15 October when five Dorothean sisters were evacuated from Bukavu.

On the political level, the Italian Government strongly supported the initiative of the President of Kenya, Arap Moi, to convene in Nairobi a high-level meeting of the Heads of Government of the seven countries that make up the Great Lakes region, in direct contact with other European partners.

Minister Dini gave instructions to Italian diplomats in Kinshasa and Kigali to urge the Government to which they were accredited to accept the Kenyan mediation initiative and the attempts under way by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and European Union special representative Aldo Ajello to declare a ceasefire that would make it possible to implement short-term humanitarian relief operations to meet the desperate conditions of the refugees in Goma.

This morning the Ambassador to Addis Ababa was once again asked to contact OAU Secretary-General Salim. Today there was also a telephone conversation between Minister Dini and Salim, who confirmed that he would be coming to Rome on Thursday for the World Food Summit.

For a few days now an Italian cooperation airplane has been on standby to bring medicine, food and clothing to Goma for the refugees, according to the indications provided by our embassies and humanitarian organizations in the field. The flight has not yet been made because of the closing of the Goma airport and the armed conflict under way until yesterday on the border between Zaire and Rwanda.

Minister Dini gave instructions to the Italian ambassadors accredited to Kigali and Kinshasa to request the consent of the respective Governments for the creation of a humanitarian corridor that would allow the delivery of relief supplies to Goma. Dini is in contact with European Union Commissioner Emma Bonino, who proposed the establishment of a corridor protected by African military forces. Once the necessary consent is granted, an Italian airplane will reach Goma in a few hours.